



**STATE SENATOR NAN RICH
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
MAY 2011**

**REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP SPENT 2011 SESSION
PURSUING RIGHT-WING AGENDA, INSTEAD OF CREATING JOBS**

The 2011 legislative session and the GOP-written budget was a colossal rejection of the mandate to focus on the economy and jobs that voters delivered in the November election.

Not one job was created, but almost 5,000 jobs were eliminated. And while the Republican leadership insisted that the budget was balanced without raising taxes, they approved a salary reduction – a salary tax – of three percent on teachers, firefighters, police officers and every other public servant in the state. Without this shell-game maneuver, funding for public education would have been cut by \$1.3 billion dollars statewide, or \$540 per student. Because the Legislature plugged that gaping hole by taking three percent of teachers' salaries, the cut won't be as big. But school budgets in both Broward and Dade will still have to be cut by more than \$100 million each.

Finally, funding for Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten was cut from \$2,562 per student this year to \$2,383 per student for the coming year, which is the lowest it's been since voters passed the constitutional amendment mandating VPK in 2002. This level of funding cannot possibly cover the cost of providing the free, high-quality pre-kindergarten education that voters had in mind when they voted for this amendment.

Floridians are overwhelmingly worried about the economy, their livelihoods, their ability to keep their homes, feed their families and have access to a family doctor for basic medical care. But the Republican leadership ignored them. They focused instead on abortion restrictions, blocking federal health care reform, gutting decades of growth management policy, bashing unions, suppressing the Democratic vote, and every other hard-core priority of a national right wing agenda.

In addition, the GOP legislative leadership quietly squirreled away millions in taxpayers' money to fight the Fair Districts amendments that voters resoundingly passed to stop the gerrymandering of legislative and Congressional districts. It is unconscionable that in such dire economic times as these, Republicans diverted these tax dollars from services for the people just to protect their grip on power. Equally bad, they passed a sweeping elections bill that will make it more difficult for voters to have their votes

counted, for groups like the League of Women voters to register voters, and for citizens to get constitutional amendments on the ballot.

The budget was balanced with lopsided priorities. Despite promises to take up legislation that would have collected new revenue without raising taxes, such proposals were never even heard by a single committee. The Democrats' bills would have required multi-state and multinational corporations to pay for the roads they use, the police that protect them, the education that trains their employees and teaches their children, and the courts in which they enforce their contracts by stopping the shell game of moving profits out of state.

To the Republicans, it's OK to tax teachers and first responders, it's OK to cut funding to children's hospitals and nursing homes, it's OK to sweep transportation trust funds that put our people to work, and it's OK to raise university tuition once again. But it's not OK to ask favored CEO's, who outsource their profits and Florida jobs, to pay their fair share.

They also seem to have no problem asking our most vulnerable residents to try to survive with fewer services and protections. This session, they passed sweeping changes to the Medicaid program, which will put just about everybody into an HMO – a move that is sure to lead to a decreased level of care while the managed care companies profit. In addition, nursing home staffing ratios were cut, so that residents will receive less hands-on care -- a move we know will increase the rate of patient neglect and premature death.

Fortunately, there were some bright moments. Senate Democrats played a pivotal role in weakening legislation aimed directly at the Supreme Court and the critical separation of powers. We stopped legislation that would have barred patients from suing hospitals that were negligent. And we were instrumental in blocking an Arizona-style immigration bill targeting our Latino and other ethnic residents. We also stopped the attack on public employees' unions. And where we could not stop the sweeping embrace by the Republican majority of the right wing agenda, we made sure that the voices of opposition – the voices of moderate Floridians everywhere – were clearly heard.

While some good policy may have been tucked into the budget, I could not justify support for a spending plan that once again relies on the very young, the very old, our students, our public servants, and our working and middle class families to plug a \$3.5 billion budget hole by surrendering critical services, programs, and a quality education so necessary to attract good paying jobs.

Floridians ready and eager to work voted last November for the jobs Republicans promised them. Sadly, that's not what this year's session or budget delivered.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to serve as your State Senator. If you have any comments or questions on any issue related to Florida government, please feel free to contact my office at (954) 747-7933 or email at rich.nan.web@flsenate.gov.